

Reentering the Healthcare Field: Resources for Foreign-trained Health Professionals in Maine

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University of New England.

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1. Introduction

Nationally, there is growing evidence that the under-representation of minority healthcare providers is of staggering proportions. Within the United States, African Americans, Hispanic Americans, and American Indians comprise 25% of the population; yet, they only make up 9% of our nation's nurses, 6% of our physicians, and 5% of our dentists (Sullivan Commission, 2004). In a country as diverse as ours, this means that too many people are left without access to culturally and linguistically-appropriate medical care, which is clearly linked to poorer health outcomes (IOM, 2002).

Compounding the problem is the fact that Maine, like many states, faces a severe shortage of healthcare providers not only those who come from different cultural backgrounds. The disparity in both the diversity and number of healthcare providers is predicted to worsen over the coming decades. Every county in Maine has areas designated as Health Professional Shortage Areas by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (Health Resources and Services Administration, 2008). One example from The National Center for Health Workforce Analysis predicts that Maine will face a shortfall of 30.8% for registered nurses.

Meanwhile, the demand for healthcare is only expected to grow as the state of Maine's population, already the oldest in the nation, continues to age. At the same time, Maine continues to become increasingly diverse, and the need for culturally and linguistically appropriate medical care is intensifying.

The current healthcare labor shortage clearly has negative effects on patients - in one survey, 68% percent of Maine hospitals said the workforce shortage has affected patients' access to care (Maine Hospital Association, 2001). In addition, the lack of access to culturally-appropriate healthcare has been clearly linked to poorer health outcomes for racial and ethnic minorities (Institute of Medicine, 2002). The healthcare workforce shortage and lack of diversity within medical professions may leave Maine with a workforce that cannot adequately meet the needs of our state's growing diversity and demand for health services.

As an organization dedicated to providing culturally and linguistically appropriate healthcare to migrant and seasonal farmworkers and their families, the Maine Migrant Health Program (MMHP) has a vested interest in helping to develop a competent and diverse healthcare workforce for Maine's future. Maine may have one untapped resource that would allow our health workforce to grow in size and in capacity to provide culturally and linguistically appropriate care: the internationally-trained health professionals who have come to the state as refugees and immigrants.

In the course of providing services to farmworkers, MMHP has occasionally encountered farmworkers who have worked as social workers, psychologists, and nurses in their home countries. Many are interested in using their professional training in the U.S. but are stymied by barriers that include lack of recognition of their professional license, lack of English proficiency, immigration status, and lack of understanding of the U.S. licensing process.

Farmworkers' migratory lifestyles, settlement in rural areas, and work schedule may make it difficult for them to further their education or improve their language skills. Moreover, as some of the nation's poorest-paid laborers, seasonal and migrant farmworkers may perhaps not be able to afford the fees

associated with licensing or be able to take the time needed to further their education. Although immigrants and refugees who are not agricultural workers are less likely to live in isolated areas, they too face many of the same barriers as farmworkers.

II. Methodology

In the summer of 2009, MMHP made its first formal attempt to identify agricultural workers who are trained healthcare professionals. Outreach workers attempted to find health professionals during the blueberry and broccoli harvests but were unable to identify any workers who fit that profile. In prior years, MMHP staff had encountered a handful of foreign-trained health professionals laboring as farmworkers. Despite the low number of farmworkers trained in medical professions, there are almost certainly more sizable numbers of health professionals in the state's wider immigrant and refugee communities. These individuals have as of yet not been specifically identified or interviewed by MMHP even though the effort has begun to identify them.

In Maine, however, few resources exist to help these foreign-trained healthcare professionals obtain licensing, and the process can be complicated. To that end, MMHP has undertaken this compilation, pulling together the licensing requirements for four common health professions: nurse, psychologist, dentist, and physician, and the available educational and training resources for foreign-trained health professionals. The report also includes a case-study of an effort in Rhode Island to bring foreign-trained health professionals into the healthcare workforce.

While this particular resource is not exhaustive, it is our hope that it will serve as a starting point for individuals looking to obtain licensing in the U.S., will help other organizations interested in issues of healthcare, and will enable the employment of refugees and immigrants in Maine.

III. Licensing Information

Nurses

In order to practice nursing in the U.S., foreign-trained nurses must first be licensed to practice in the country in which they received their education.

The Commission on Graduates of Foreign Nursing Schools (CGFNS) will then assess the nurse's credentials and administer a qualifying exam that determines whether or not the applicant's education and experience are sufficient to work in the U.S. CGFNS also requires nurses to prove their English proficiency using the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC), or the International English Language Testing System. Once a nurse has been certified by CGFNS, he or she must pass the National Council Licensure Examination (NCELEX) and obtain a U.S. social security number.

Nurses that pass the necessary exams and met the CGFNS requirements are eligible to apply for licensure with the Maine State Board of Nursing.

Resources:

Maine State Board of Nursing

www.maine.gov/boardofnursing/
161 Capitol St.
158 State House Station
Augusta, Maine , 04333-0158
Phone: (207) 287-1133
Fax: (207) 287-1149

Commission on Graduates of Foreign Nursing Schools International: <http://www.cgfns.org/>

The Official Guide for Foreign-Educated Nurses: A guide book that walks nurses through the entire process of migrating to the US and working here. Published by CGFNS and available at http://www.springerpub.com/prod.aspx?prod_id=10657 for \$35.00

Physicians

All foreign-trained physicians must complete a post-graduate residency in the U.S. in order to be eligible to apply for U.S. licensure.

To begin, physicians must apply for certification by the Educational Commission for Foreign Medical Graduates (ECFMG.) The next step is a credential evaluation; ECFMG will evaluate the physician's transcripts and diplomas to assess an individual's educational level. Then, the applicant must pass at least two exams, one of which has a hands-on practical component meant to evaluate a physician's readiness to care for patients and his/her level of English proficiency.

Those who pass these exams will be certified by ECFMG to apply to US residency programs through the National Resident Matching Program (NRMP). The majority of residency programs are typically two to three years in length.

After completing residency, the process of licensing for foreign-trained physicians is identical to that of those educated in the U.S. The Maine Board of Licensure in Medicine licenses physicians in Maine and requires all applicants to pass a board-administered jurisprudence exam.

Resources:

Maine Board of Licensure in Medicine

http://www.docboard.org/me/me_home.htm

161 Capitol Street

137 State House Station

Augusta, Maine 04333-0137

Tel: (207) 287-3601

Fax: (207) 287-6590

The Educational Commission on Foreign Medical Graduates: <http://www.ecfmg.org/>

Dentists

The State of Maine Board of Dental Examiners does not recognize international dental degrees. Foreign-trained dentists must receive the degree of Doctor of Dental Medicine (DMD) or Doctor of Dental Surgery (DDS) from a U.S. dental school. This can take up to two years, but the length of time varies depending on the dentist's prior training and school they choose to attend.

Some dental schools do offer advance standing to graduates of international dentistry schools (see Appendix A for a list from 2007). Others have special programs designed to meet the needs of international dentistry students. In general, dentists must pass the TOEFL exam in order to begin study at a U.S. institution.

Once the dentist has acquired a DMD or DDS, they must pass a jurisprudence exam administered by the State of Maine Board of Dental Examiners. After passing the exam, the dentist is eligible to apply for licensure in Maine through the State of Maine Board of Dental Examiners. The board will conduct a background check and verify the applicant's training and education.

Resources:

State of Maine Board of Dental Examiners

www.mainedental.org
143 State House Station
161 Capitol Street
Augusta, ME 04333-0143
Phone: 207-287-3333
Fax: 207-287-8140

The American Dental Association: has a great deal of information, including information on licensing for international dentists: www.ada.org

Graduate programs tailored to international dentistry students:
http://www.ada.org/prof/prac/licensure/licensure_intl_dentist_programs.pdf

Psychologists

The Maine Board of Examiners of Psychologists licenses psychologists in Maine. Individuals who intend to practice psychotherapy in an organization or private practice must have a PhD and be graduates of programs that meet criteria specified by the board. Individuals should contact the board for specific information on qualifying programs.

Some foreign-trained psychologists may also find opportunities to work as a counselor or social worker for non-profit, community-based organizations that serve people such as the elderly, children, people with mental health disabilities, or those with substance abuse issues. English language proficiency is generally a requirement for these jobs, and speaking a second language can be an advantage.

Resources:

Maine Board of Examiners of Psychologists

<http://www.maine.gov/pfr/professionallicensing/professions/psychologists/index.htm>

35 State House Station

Augusta, ME 04333-0035

Phone: (207) 624-8689

Fax: (207) 624-863

IV. Case Study

The Rhode Island (RI) Welcome Back Center has had success in supporting internationally-trained health professionals through the many steps in the re-licensing process. The RIWBC is one of several centers affiliated with the nationwide Welcome Back Initiative, a program that works to reduce barriers for internationally trained health professionals seeking to work in a healthcare field in the U.S.

Based at the Dorcas Place Adult and Family Learning Center in Providence, the center opened in June 2008 and concentrates on four targeted professions: physicians, nurses, social workers, and physical therapists. It serves individuals who have been internationally trained and licensed in these fields and are currently living in Rhode Island.

The RI Welcome Back Center provides a range of services which include English language training, educational case management, and career counseling. It helps participants develop a personal career path plan and helps them throughout the process of obtaining the appropriate licenses for their profession. It also provides participants with alternative pathways to consider which can include other health profession training programs or careers in healthcare management, research, or advocacy. The center also organizes group workshops, activities, exam study groups, and informational meetings.

In its first year, the RI Welcome Back Center has worked with 54 physicians, 42 nurses, 6 social workers, 5 physical therapists, and 41 other health professionals.

It may be worth exploring whether a center that takes its cues from the RI Welcome Back Center model could help Maine bolster its ranks of health professionals and increase cultural and linguistic diversity within the healthcare field here. Such a center could be based at an existing adult learning center, community college, or university.

For more information: RI Welcome Back Center
riwelcomebackcenter.ning.com
410-237-8866

V. Recommendations

In sum, Maine should take advantage of the skills foreign-trained health professionals offer by supporting them with appropriate language instruction, job training, and test preparation.

As demonstrated in the case study: a center [such as the RI Welcome Back Center model] could help Maine bolster its ranks of health professionals and increase cultural and linguistic diversity within the healthcare fields. A training and support center could be based at an existing adult learning center, community college, or university. However, that center would take time and resources to develop, and the exact number of immigrants, refugees, and agricultural workers fitting that foreign-trained healthcare professional profile is to-date, still unknown.

With those challenges in mind, another strategy for addressing the potential need to train and qualify these existing professionals already in Maine would be to have adequate support to navigate through the licensure process and enable access to health education resources, most notably English language programs, and job training centers. Further exploration is needed to assess how such support should be accessible in Maine, the location of such resources (geographic or telehealth), and the spectrum of services (i.e. social, educational, and language) needed.

Foreign-trained professionals need to be proficient in English not only to communicate with patients but also to pass licensure exams and continue with their education. Another key recommendation would be to expand the availability of targeted English programs for specific professions that teach necessary job skills at the same time or within a continuous program. In doing so, these healthcare professionals would gain language proficiency in ESOL classes while honing their particular healthcare expertise through job training. A program like this would require active support to help individuals move from mastering English to job training and on to licensure. There is experience with this model in Maine which can serve as a starting point.

Taking the long view for the future economic health of these individuals and their families, it may be more effective to assist individuals in securing a higher paying job with benefits that matches their skills rather than re-training them in a position that may lead to chronic underemployment and underutilization of their skills.

Lastly, existing organizations that serve or are based in Maine's immigrant communities should assess *in general* how they can identify, support, and track these professionals in their communities so that their skills are utilized. By identifying, training, and supporting foreign-trained professionals, Maine will be able to make use of the skills of medical professionals and others, such as teachers, professors, and scientists, whose qualifications may not automatically transfer to the U.S. without guided assistance through the licensing process. Their expertise in medicine, nursing, education, arts, and science, will benefit their cultural and linguistic communities in addition to enriching professions throughout the state.

V.I. Resources

Welcome Back Centers

National Welcome Back Initiative

City College of San Francisco

John Adams Campus

1860 Hayes Street, Room 102

San Francisco, CA 94117-1220

Phone: (415) 561-1833

Fax: (415) 561-1948

Email: dvasquez@ccsf.edu

www.e-welcomeback.org

English Language Learning and Testing Resources

Adult Learning Centers

Offer English classes for speakers of other languages (ESOL) as well as other job-training and citizenship classes.

Bangor Learning Center

<http://www.bangorschools.net/content/4050/ESL/>

121 York Street

992-5523

Bangor, ME 04401

207- 941-6315

Portland Adult Education

www.portlandadulthood.org

150 Ocean Avenue

Portland, ME 04103

207-775-0432

Lewiston Adult Learning Center

<https://www.lewistonadulthood.org/students.php?q=abe>

145 Birch St.

Lewiston, ME 04240

784-2928 x2

The Intensive English Institute at University of Maine at Orono

Offers a range of English classes for speakers of other languages, including English for medical professionals, TOEFL preparation, and English classes for a range of levels. Semester-length and shorter courses are offered.

Intensive English Institute

<http://www.umaine.edu/iei/default.htm>

5732 Hannibal Hamlin Hall

The University of Maine, Orono, ME 04469

Phone: (207) 581-3821 | Fax: (207) 581-3803
e-mail: ieium@umit.maine.edu

Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) Services

Educational Testing Service (ETS)

PO Box 6151

Princeton, NJ 08541-6151 USA

Telephone: +1 (609) 771-7100 or +1 (877) 863-3546

Web site: <http://www.ets.org>

Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) Testing Program

Educational Testing Service (ETS)

Rosedale Road

Princeton, NJ 08540 USA

Telephone: +1 (800) 771-7170

Fax: +1 (609) 771-7111

Email: toeic@ets.org

Web site: <http://www.ets.org/toeic>

International English Language Testing System (IELTS)

IELTS International

Suite 112

825 Colorado Boulevard

Los Angeles, CA 90041 USA

Job Training Resources in Maine

STTAR Consultancy Services

This organization serves the Somali community, providing training on job skills, workplace culture, and English training.

Ismail Ahmed, MA
Senior Consultant
STTAR Consultancy Services
Refugee Acculturation & Self-Sufficiency
431 Main St.
Lewiston, Maine 04240
(207) 376-6604
sttarras@gmail.com

Portland Adult Education

Provides a range of services including English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), medical terminology classes, and job skills classes for refugees and immigrants.

Portland Adult Education
www.portlandadulthood.org
150 Ocean Avenue
Portland, ME 04103
207-775-0432

Farmworker Jobs Program

A federally-funded program providing job training and tuition assistance to farmworkers and their families.

Chris Huh
Eastern Maine Development Corporation
45 Oak St.
Bangor, ME 04401
207-561-4030 (office)
207-951-0840 (mobile)

Career Centers

The Maine Department of Labor operates over a dozen CareerCenters across the state. The centers offer a variety of training and job search services at no charge.

Augusta CareerCenter
21 Enterprise Drive, Suite 2
109 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333
Tel: 624-5120 or 1-800-760-1573 Fax: 287-6236
TTY: 1-800-633-0770

Bangor CareerCenter
45 Oak Street, Suite 3
Bangor, ME 04401-6667
Tel: 561-4050 or 1-888-828-0568 Fax: 561-4066
TTY: 1-800-498-6711

Lewiston CareerCenter
5 Mollison Way
Lewiston, ME 04240-5805
Tel: 753-9000 or 1-800-741-2991 Fax: 783-5301
TTY: 1-877-796-9833

Machias CareerCenter
15 Prescott Drive, Suite 1
Machias, ME 04654-9752
Tel: 255-1900 or 1-800-292-8929 Fax: 255-4778
TTY: 1-800-381-9932

Portland CareerCenter
185 Lancaster Street
Portland, ME 04101-2453
Tel: 771-5627 or 1-877-594-5627 Fax: 822-0221
TTY: 1-888-817-7113

Presque Isle CareerCenter
66 Spruce Street, Suite 1
Presque Isle, ME 04769-3222
Tel: 760-6300 or 1-800-635-0357 Fax: 760-6350
TTY: 1-888-697-2877

Please see <http://www.mainecareercenter.com/locations.shtml> for a complete list of CareerCenter locations.

Healthcare Resources in Maine

Area Health Education Centers (AHEC)

Work to improve the supply, distribution, and diversity of healthcare providers in Maine's rural and underserved areas.

Mark D. Ruggiero

Director, Maine AHEC Network; Assistant Professor of Public Health, University of New England
Linnell Hall 109

207-221-4462

mruggiero@une.edu

www.une.edu/faculty/profiles/mruggiero.cfm

Lisa A. Buck, M.D.

AHEC Clinical Coordinator; Clinical Director, BAHEC at PCHC

207-992-2636

lbuck@pchcbangor.org

Bangor Area Health Education Center

Sarah Dubay

Director, Bangor AHEC; Director of Executive Services, Penobscot Community Health Care

1048 Union Street, Suite 5

Bangor, ME 04401

207-945-5247 ext. 402

Email: sdubay@pchcbangor.org

www.pchcbangor.org

Franklin Area Health Education Center

Karen Rogers

Director, Franklin AHEC; Director of Education, Franklin Community Health Network

Franklin Memorial Hospital

Farmington, ME 04938

207-779-2575

kr Rogers@fchn.org

www.fchn.org

Rural Community Area Health Education Center

Jim Dowling

Director, Rural Community AHEC; Workforce Development Manager, MPCA

73 Winthrop Street

Augusta, ME 04330

207-621-0677 ext. 203

jrdowling@mepca.org

www.mepca.org

Central Maine Medical Center College of Nursing and Health Professions

70 Middle Street

Lewiston, Maine 04240
(207) 795-2840
info@cmmcson.org
www.cmmcson.org

Maine Migrant Health Program

Provides primary and preventative healthcare services to migrant and seasonal farmworkers across the state.

www.mainemigranthealth.org
9 Green Street, P.O. Box 405
Augusta, ME 04332
207-622-9252
888-351-9634 (*toll free*)

Southern Maine Community College Nursing Program

2 Fort Road
South Portland, ME 04106
www.smccme.edu
<http://smccme.edu/academics/nursing/>
<http://smccme.edu/academics/nursing/>

The University of New England
Portland and Biddeford locations
207-283-0171
www.une.edu

The University of Maine Health Professions Office
Crisanne Kadamus Blackie, Health & Legal Professions Career Specialist
207-581-2587
crisanne.blackie@umit.maine.edu

The University of Southern Maine College of Nursing and Health Professions

University of Southern Maine
96 Falmouth Street □ PO Box 9300
Portland, ME 04104-9300
(207) 780-4505
800-800-4USM
con@usm.maine.edu
<http://www.usm.maine.edu/con/>